Introduction. Contextualizing and Interpreting the 15th Lok Sabha Elections

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1   Most of the papers presented in this special issue of SAMAJ are the outcome of a workshop organised by the Centre de Sciences Humaines in New Delhi in July 2009. By then the results of the 2009 general elections had been largely commented upon already. The workshop was therefore not meant to discuss electoral results per se, but rather to have specialists discuss papers that considered elections as an analyzer of political dynamics that most authors usually studied in more ordinary times.[1] As Butler, Lahiri and Roy (1995: 5) put it, 'every election is a potential turning point in history and deserves a full study as a contemporary event, an opportunity to observe politicians and party organizations at full stretch, to examine the influence of press and broadcasting, to assess the involvement of ordinary citizens'.

2   Indeed reading election studies over time shows how elections serve as landmarks in the analysis of India's political system.[2] Each major electoral consultation offers an opportunity to produce interpretations which also contribute to the evolution of the polity. Thus the Fourth election (1967) marked the end of Congress dominance in the states; the Eighth election (1977) marked the beginning of the end of Congress dominance at the Centre; the Tenth (1996) and more decisively the Twelfth elections (1998) signaled the opening of the era of coalitions. Elections, as events, crystallize ongoing processes and highlight some major shifts even while they obliterate others.

3   The macro-perspective chosen by most authors in this issue aims to contextualize the 15th elections to the Lok Sabha, *i.e.* the lower chamber of the Indian Parliament, with a view to highlighting this production of interpretations of the vote, by different actors, for different publics, with different objectives.

The interpretation of election results by political actors

4   One possible approach is to view elections from the way in which election results, once declared, are interpreted by the political actors themselves. The search for meaning in the analysis of electoral results and trends relies heavily on the interpretation of the intentions of voters, both before and after the elections. Those who seek to understand these intentions are, first and foremost, the candidates themselves, both the winners and the losers. For the winners, staying ahead requires an accurate assessment of where their strengths lie, while for those who failed to make it, it is important to have clues on constituencies that can be won over. There are in addition interpretations based on surveys, both pre- and post-poll.[3] With all their analytical sophistication, the interpretation of results remains problematic in terms of attributing rationality or irrationality to it.[4]

5   Winning parties have their own networks of political intelligence, and have access to the interpretations of professional analysts too. Their very survival depends on an accurate assessment and interpretation of the mandate they have received from their support base, since the vocation of a ruling party is to remain in power till the next round, and beyond.

6   The party which loses power also proceeds to introspect on the reasons for its defeat in order to work out ways of coming back to power. This introspection is generally based on inputs from states where they did well and those where they fared poorly, in order to evolve a winning strategy for the next round. Finally, for the single-state and multi-state parties which find themselves in the pool of coalition partners and allies, they have to often decide whether they situate themselves in the government or with the opposition camp till the next round of consultations, whether state or national.[5] These calculations are complex, for they must interpret the result in their own state and work out strategies for leveraging central ties without endangering their own primary objective i.e. the capture of power in the state.

7   Thus one approach to contextualizing the Lok Sabha elections is to view them within the framework of inter-party relations in a multi-level federal polity, and to assess their impact on public policy processes in the intervening periods. It is evident that the assessments and interpretations of electoral mandates by parties, particularly those in power, have a direct bearing on public policy choices. This is equally applicable to opposition parties and the policies they combat. More often than not, it is a delicate balancing act of extracting political mileage from visibly popular welfare policies while performing, at the same time, the role of the opposition, *i.e.* to oppose.[6]

8   Government-opposition relations are crucial to understanding political processes in parliamentary democracies. In a federal polity, this relationship runs concurrently at two levels, with calendars that criss-cross ever since national and state elections were delinked in 1971-72.[7] Federal coalitions consist of concentric circles and the calculations that enter into their construction are heavily influenced by the electoral calendar and compulsions of the partners and allies in each of the circles.

State goals, federal imperatives

9   In decoding the mandate that flows from the 2009 consultation, we need to contextualize the results at two levels of the federal polity, the national and the state, and attempt to define the nature of the link between the two. One way of doing this is to first situate the 15th Lok Sabha elections in terms of the defining trends of the last two decades, since the convincing defeat of the Congress in 1989. Clues to the links between the levels of the dual federal polity can emerge by exploring the ways in which elections at the state level have been linked to or delinked from the Lok Sabha electoral mandates. The responses of federal coalitions, which have their own internal logic, to the continuing challenge of the electoral consultations calendar are equally instructive. Finally, empirical data on decision making in federal coalitions reveals that the systemic innovations first introduced by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government (1999-2004) and further developed by the first Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government (2004-09) ensure that constituency concerns of coalition members are adequately addressed and thus play an important role in maintaining governmental stability.[8]

10   While movements and parties have distinct and often identifiable social roots, they respond to institutional parameters in devising their electoral tactics and strategies. Ever since the debate on the relative weight to be attached to these two elements between Maurice Duverger (1954) and Georges Lavau (1955) in the 1950s, political science has tried to grapple with this issue. The fragmentation of party systems usually has clear social roots, and in the case of India, given the caste configuration and cultural pluralism of the polity, their political articulation is conditioned, and frequently determined, by the structure of electoral opportunities of the multilevel federal polity. In these calculations, the fact that the federal polity is centralized in its distribution of power and resources further weighs on the choices made.

11   One of the durable trends of the period under study is the steady increase in the number of single-state and multi-state parties as a result of the federalization of the party system. [9] One can analytically distinguish between the first generation state parties which were born in the pre-independence era or under the Congress dominance phase, from the state parties that came into being in the subsequent phase. While the most prominent ones were primarily based on territorial identity politics, those based on ideological specificities were no less significant (Tirimagni-Hurtig & Arora 1972).[10] The second generation of state parties resulted from the gradual splintering and eventual collapse of the Congress during its 1969-1977 hyper-centralization phase and the subsequent implosion of the short-lived Janata alternative.[11] These single-state and multi-state parties constitute the building blocks of federal coalitions since the 1996 elections witnessed a sharp decline in the Congress seat share and the BJP was totally unprepared for occupying the political space so vacated. As the following tables show, the popularity of single-state and multi-state parties remains undiminished.[12]

Table 1. Distribution of Lok Sabha Seats between All-India and State Parties 1996-2009

	11LS:1996	12LS:1998	13LS:1999	14LS:2004	15LS:2009

	% Seats	% Seats	% Seats	% Seats	% Seats
All-India Parties					
Congress	25.8	26.0	21.0	26.7	37.9
BJP	29.6	33.5	33.5	25.4	21.4
Sub Total INC+BJP	55.4	59.5	54.5	52.1	59.3
State Parties					
Multi-state parties*	18.8	11.8	13.3	14.9.	9.9
Single-State parties & Independents.	25.8	28.7	32.2	33.0	30.8
Sub Total State Parties	44.6	40.5	45.5	47.9	40.7
Grand Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 2. Division of Vote Share in the Lok Sabha between All-India and State Parties 1996-2009

	11LS:1996	12LS:1998	13LS:1999	14LS:2004	15LS:2009
	% Vote share	% Vote share	% Vote share	% Vote share	% Vote share
All-India Parties					
Congress	28.80	25.82	28.30	26.53	28.52
BJP	20.29	25.59	23.75	22.16	18.84
Sub Total INC+BJP	49.09	51.41	52.05	48.59	47.36
State Parties					
Multi-state parties*	22.72	19.36	20.11	16.61	16.24
Single-State parties and Independents	28.19	29.23	27.84	34.80	36.40
Sub Total State Parties	50.91	48.59	47.95	51.41	52.64
Grand Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source for Tables 1 & 2: Election Commission of India (http://eci.nic.in)

*MULTI-STATE PARTIES ARE THE SMALLER PARTIES RECOGNIZED AS 'NATIONAL' BY THE ELECTION COMMISSION IN SUCCESSIVE ELECTIONS. IN 2009 THESE WERE CPM, CPI, BSP, RJD, AND NCP.

12 Two immediate observations impose themselves from even a cursory reading of these tables: (a) the ratio of seats won by the all-India parties in relation to the state parties is similar in 2009 to the 1998 level; and (b) the drop in their combined vote share is a continuing trend, the lowest among all five elections. This is, on the face of it, not 'a radical shift in the social basis of political power' that the 2004 electoral outcome appeared to be at first glance.[13] This said, the working of the First Passed the Post (FPTP) electoral system is such that, with all these limitations, the votes did translate into a comfortable win for the Congress, and gave it the option of being able to pick and choose its coalition partners.[14]

13 While there is no authoritative indication of the BJP reading of its dismal performance, the Congress has put forward its own interpretation of why it won.[15] It sees the renewal of its mandate as a vindication of the policy architecture of inclusion it built up during its first term in office. 'It is a mandate for inclusive growth, equitable development and a secular and plural India.'[16] It also views the mandate as a desire for peace and stability, and places internal security as the first priority of the new government.

14 If one has to explain the resurgence of the Congress in what appeared to be at one stage a 'post-Congress polity', one also has to explain what happened to the other pillar of conventional wisdom: the anti-incumbency vote. The hypothesis that deserves to be further tested is that it held good during periods of poor economic growth and was a reflection of the desperation of the electorate, willing to try any other option available to see if it delivered any better living conditions. The recent trend of renewal of election mandates is interpreted by the winning parties as an endorsement of their effective delivery of welfare policies.[17] Effective economic policy in the electoral context is primarily seen as the ability of governments to keep prices in check and to ensure basic necessities. Political mileage for other achievements such as the provision of jobs and welfare benefits is keenly contested between central and state governments. As Table 3 shows, thirty single-state parties and nine independents managed to find a place in the Lok Sabha.

Table 3. 15th Lok Sabha Elections 2009: Seats won by All India and State Parties

	Seats Won	Seats (in %)	States
All India Parties			
Indian National Congress	206	37.94	All India vote share 28.52%
Bharatiya Janata Party	116	21.36	All India vote share 18.83%
Total All-India Parties (2)	322	59.30	Combined vote share 47.35%
Multi-State Parties/ECI Recognized National			(Vote share % in brackets)
Bahujan Samaj Party	21	4.99	U.P. + (6.17)
Communist Party of India	4	0.74	W. Bengal, Kerala + (1.43)

Communist Party of India (Marxist)	16	2.95	W. Bengal, Kerala, Tripura (5.34)
Nationalist Congress Party	9	1.66	Maharashtra, Meghalaya (2.04)
Rashtriya Janata Dal	4	0.74	Bihar (1.27)
Total Multi-State/ ECI Recognized National (5)	**54**	**9.94**	**Total Vote share 16.26**
State Parties ECI Recognized			
All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	9	1.66	Tamil Nadu (1.67)
All India Forward Bloc	2	0.37	West Bengal (0.32)
All India Trinamool Congress	19	3.50	West Bengal (3.20)
Asom Gana Parishad	1	0.18	Assam (0.43)
Assam United Democratic Front	1	0.18	Assam (NA)
Biju Janata Dal	14	2.58	Orissa (1.59)
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	18	3.31	Tamil Nadu (1.83)
Jammu & Kashmir National Conference	3	0.55	J&K (0.12)
Janata Dal (Secular)	3	0.55	Karnataka (0.82)
Janata Dal (United)	20	3.68	Bihar(1.52)
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	2	0.37	Jharkhand (0.40)
Kerala Congress (M)	1	0.18	Kerala (0.08)
Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	1	0.18	Tamil Nadu (NA)
Muslim League Kerala State Committee	2	0.37	Kerala(0.21)
Nagaland Peoples Front	1	0.18	Nagaland (NA)
Revolutionary Socialist Party	2	0.37	West Bengal (0.38)
Samajwadi Party	23	4.24	Uttar Pradesh (3.43)
Shiromani Akali Dal	4	0.74	Punjab (0.96)
Shiv Sena	11	2.03	Maharashtra (1.55)

Sikkim Democratic Front	1	0.18	Sikkim (0.04)
Telangana Rashtra Samithi	2	0.37	Andhra Pradesh (0.62)
Telugu Desam	6	1.10	Andhra Pradesh (2.51)
Total Single State ECI Recognized (22)	**146**	**26.89**	
ECI Unrecognized State Parties			
All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen	1	0.18	Andhra Pradesh
Bahujan Vikas Aaghadi	1	0.18	Maharashtra
Bodaland Peoples Front	1	0.18	Assam
Haryana Janhit Congress (BhajanLal)	1	0.18	Haryana
Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajatantrik)	1	0.18	Jharkhand
Rashtriya Lok Dal	5	0.92	Uttar Pradesh
Swabhimani Paksha	1	0.18	Maharashtra
Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katch	1	0.18	Tamil Nadu
Independents	9	1.66	Bihar(2), Jharkhand(2), J&K, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, W. Bengal (1 each)
Total ECI Unrecognized Single State Parties (8) + Independents (9)	21	3.87	**Total seat share of multi-state and single state parties + independents : 40.7%**
GRAND TOTAL	**543**	**100%**	

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India (Press Information Bureau , http://
www.pib.nic.in/elections2009) and Palshikar (2009). The assistance of K.K.Kailash in tabulating
electoral data is gratefully acknowledged.

15   Going further, it is to be noted that there were only 17 single-state and multi-state parties
which crossed the 0.5% threshold of significance in terms of the number of seats
obtained, *i.e.* 3 seats. Some state parties obtained a significant share of votes—enough to
influence electoral outcomes but insufficient to obtain seats for them. Notable among
them were the Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS), Desiya Murpokku Dravida
Kazhagam (DMDK) and the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP).[18]

16   The link between state and national elections is at the core of discussions on interpreting
mandates. Yogendra Yadav suggests that the principal choices are made in the state

assembly elections and the national consultation is increasingly 'derivative' (Yadav & Palshikar 2009: 55).[19] The relevance of state goals to the participation of parties in federal coalitions is undoubtedly a major element of this analysis. For example, a surprisingly large proportion of parties which joined the NDA in 2009 were in the role of the opposition at the state level, and were clearly interested in leveraging their participation to capture power in the state elections. The policy orientations and choices of federal coalitions are thus influenced by the goals of coalition members, whose horizons are in turn determined by the electoral cycles in their respective states.

17   The shift towards a bi-nodal system and the logic of federal coalitions has clear analytical implications. How is a bi-nodal system different from a bi-polar one? The distinction is, we argue, that bipolarity implies the existence of two antipodal forces, diametrically opposite, at either end of the spectrum. What we observe however is the existence of two and occasionally three principal nodes around which state parties tend to cluster in varying formations. While there are some constants around each node, there is also significant movement of parties to intermediate positions and in some cases between nodes.[20] As a recent study observes, 'the Indian party system has made a definite transition from the days of one-party dominance to a multi-party system in which the multiplicity exists more at the national than at the state level and is increasingly bound in a bi-nodal alliance system' (Lokniti 2008: 85).

18   The electoral strategies of the two major parties in a bi-nodal system and the emergence of federal coalitions are strikingly evident in the number of candidates fielded in successive Lok Sabha elections. When the BJP switched from the cobbling together of a post-electoral majority strategy (1998) to a conscious coalition-centric strategy (1999) the number of candidates it fielded dropped. Its attempts at expanding and consolidating its electoral base beyond its traditional bastions explain the subsequent increase in the number of candidates fielded. In the case of the Congress, there is a significant increase in 2009 primarily due to the reassertion strategy adopted in the key states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Table 4. Lok Sabha Seats Contested by the INC and BJP 1996-2009

	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
INC	529	477	453	417	440
BJP	471	388	339	364	433

Source: Election Commission of India http://eci.nic.in
Note: The BSP became the party to contest the largest number of seats in 2009: 500. In earlier elections, it fielded: 251 in 1998, 225 in 1999, and 435 in 2004.

19   In order to analyze the linkage between state goals and federal imperatives, the ways in which federal coalitions have attempted to reconcile different priorities in their decision-making processes is instructive. As earlier noted, the Group of Ministers (GoM) and the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) mechanisms constitute an interesting device for understanding the relationship between the two levels of electoral consultations. The UPA-I government used this device extensively and effectively to ensure participation of coalition partners in key policy decisions.[21]

20   Thus, from the public policy viewpoint, the electoral calendar of state assemblies (shown in Table 5) is clearly of particular relevance. The mandates are linked even if the elections are de-linked. The consolidation of power at the national level passes through the decimation of challengers and opponents at the state level. Hence the interpretation of the 2009 mandate by the Congress as one for effective delivery of welfare benefits to the poor attempts to cut across traditional vote bank boundaries.[22]

Table 5: Electoral calendar for renewal of 23 State Assemblies (2009-2013)

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Maharashtra	Bihar	Assam	Uttar Pradesh	Karnataka
Andhra*		Kerala	Uttarakhand	Madhya Pradesh.
Orissa*		Tamil Nadu	Gujarat	Chattisgarh
Sikkim*		West Bengal	Punjab	Rajasthan
Haryana		Puducherry	Goa	Himachal Pradesh.
Jharkhand				Delhi

Source: Compiled on the basis of dates on which the last elections were held, on the assumption that the assemblies are not prematurely dissolved. http://eci.nic.in

Notes:

1.* Elections held along with 15th LS Polls in May. Others held in Oct-Dec 2009.

2. Jammu & Kashmir Assembly has a six year term and will be up for re-election in 2014. Six north-eastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, and Arunachal) have not been included due to data uncertainties.

21   The significance of this calendar is related to the concentric circles of federal coalitions. The first circle comprises the coalition maker, the second consists of key coalition partners, the third of minor coalition partners and the fourth of parties, whether pre or post election allies, who have volunteered their support, conditionally or unconditionally, but are not part of the coalition. The electoral compulsions of the first circle have direct policy implications in terms of the prioritization of agenda items in a dual-horizon perspective. The first horizon is that of the state election, whereas the second is the objective of maintaining the majority for the full term of the mandate.[23] Thus the electoral horizons of the second circle of key partners enter into the picture. For example, two major pieces of economic reform legislation which cleared the 14th Lok Sabha but lapsed with its dissolution since the Rajya Sabha failed to approve them. They have been reintroduced in the 15th Lok Sabha, but are unlikely to be processed very rapidly till the West Bengal electoral horizon clears.[24]

22   The majoritarian temptation is ever present in coalitions, but in a bi-nodal federal polity it takes on critical dimensions. While it is natural for parties with a vocation to capture power at the national level to seek an absolute majority by themselves, the federalization of the party system might well manifest a voter desire to loosen the grip of majoritarian parties and to safeguard state autonomy.

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10

The contributors

23 Two papers in this special issue further discuss the possible interpretations and implications of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections in terms of relationships between the Centre and the states. C. Jaffrelot and G. Verniers analyze the 2009 electoral results with a view to testing two hypotheses that have been largely discussed lately: (i) the hypothesis of the re-centralization of the political scene, after a series of elections that seemed, on the contrary, to manifest the increasing importance of the states as decisive political arenas; and (ii) the hypothesis of the ethnicization of political parties. They conclude that the regionalization of politics is continuing, and that the coalition era is far from over.

24 In a more theoretical perspective, C. Robin and B. Lefebvre situate this latest round of elections in the international literature on coalition formation; they analyze the dynamics of coalition formation since the emergence of the NDA in the late 1990s, with a focus on a largely overlooked, and yet critical aspect: that of pre-electoral coalitions. Their study relies on a geographical methodology that suggests that the contrasted regional presence of the two coalition leaders, the Congress and the BJP, is a major factor in their respective success as such.

25 R. Chowdhury's paper then allows us to zoom in on the interplay between state and national politics, with a case study of Jammu and Kashmir focusing on the intertwining of mainstream and separatist strategy and practice in that state, which has also been governed by coalition governments for the past few years. The paper also draws attention to the continued significance of identity politics, which sustains state parties in many parts of the country: Telangana, Bodoland, Gorkhaland, Jharkhand and most of the northeastern states.

26 Finally, S. Tawa Lama-Rewal reflects on the conditions of production of election studies in India. Her critical review of this literature underlines the variety of perspectives and methodologies that can be, and have been, used in studying elections. She draws attention to the important role of the media in funding and publicizing a major brand of election studies, i.e. survey research. She also emphasizes the significant, but today largely under-represented, contribution of anthropology to the understanding of this rich phenomenon. Her paper argues that election studies are really in between science and politics, which makes it all the more necessary to contextualize them—and this is precisely what this issue of SAMAJ is aiming at.

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NOTES

1. Workshop 'Elections 2009' held at the India International Centre, New Delhi with the support of the Centre de Sciences Humaines, on 31st July 2009. We would like to record our thanks to all the paper presenters, discussants and sessions chairs who contributed to the very lively discussion.

2. But the same perusal also underlines the risk of hasty conclusions: for instance *Electoral Studies* stated that 'the 1999 general election appears to have put an end to Sonia Gandhi's short-lived political career' (Saez 2001).

3. In the introduction to the 2004 National Election Study (NES) of Lokniti, Yogendra Yadav admitted, 'The outcome of the 14th general elections to the Lok Sabha constitutes a puzzle, something that continues to elude political actors, analysts and the public even six months after [the results...] The mandate of the election is not clear even today. Neither the political establishment nor the knowledge industry has been able to forge anything like a shared consensus regarding the message of this general election.' (Lokniti team 2004: 5373). See also Shastri et al (2009).

4. Thus, is voting driven by anti-incumbency or by caste loyalty rational or irrational? American historian Rick Shenkman (author of *Just How Stupid Are We*?) argues that "throw the bums out' may not be a sophisticated response to adversity but it is a rational one.' Cited in Bartels 2008: 50.

5. It is not that political actors themselves always find it easy to interpret the results which concern them in the first instance. Speaking of the BJP's assessment of its electoral reverses in the last two elections, Yashwant Sinha, a prominent leader of the party, said of the 2004 election 'we believe we lost accidentally.' (Conversation with Shekhar Gupta 'Walk the Talk', *Indian Express*, 27 July 2009).

6. In the interpretation of mandates by political parties, a crucial element of course is the degree of democratic functioning within the party and the possibilities for a free flow of political intelligence from the constituency to the leadership levels. Frequently, factions and coteries impede this flow, with obvious consequences for sound decisions.

7. On 27 December 1970, Indira Gandhi prematurely dissolved the Lok Sabha elected in 1967 and won handsomely the February 1971 elections. Following her spectacular foreign policy initiative thereafter which led to the creation of Bangladesh in December 1971, she repeated her electoral success in the state assembly polls held in March 1972 in most states.

8. Thus, the Group of Ministers mechanism was devised to meet needs generated by coalitional power-sharing which could not be met by the traditional inter-ministerial coordination devices. Also, leadership of the coalition in Parliament was delinked from leadership of the party in the two Houses of Parliament by the UPA, a practice which was subsequently adopted by the NDA.

9. We prefer the term 'federalization' to the more frequently used 'fragmentation', because the latter captures the reality without offering any explanation for the occurrence. We believe that there is a pattern along which the fragmentation takes place, a 'method in the madness' which goes beyond personality issues and ego clashes. As the number of state assemblies has grown, so has the number of single – state parties, a process which began with the reorganization of states and has continued since. The federalization of the party system denotes its restructuring, during the post-Congress dominance phase, along the fault-lines of the federal polity. Parties rarely succeed in transcending state boundaries and achieving multi-state social mobilization.

10. Prominent among the identity-based parties which still survive, with their off-shoots and avatars, are the Muslim League, the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Dravida Munnettra Kazhagam, the

Jammu & Kashmir National Conference, and parties of Jharkhand, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Goa, and Telangana. The ideological specificity group comprises Left parties such as the Forward Bloc, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Peasants and Workers Party.

11. In this category we would include the Janata Dals (JDU, JDS, BJD, RJD), the Rashtriya Lok Dal, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, and the three major 'regionalist' parties to emerge during this phase, the Shiv Sena, the Asom Gana Parishad and the Telugu Desam Party. See K.C.Suri, 'Telugu Desam Party' and Suhas Palshikar, 'Shiv Sena' in DeSouza and Sridharan (2006).

12. We use the term multi-state parties to designate parties recognized as 'national' by the Election Commission from time to time, other than the two all-India parties. This device enables consistent comparison, since the only characteristic these parties have in common is their meeting the ECI mandated threshold of electoral significance in electoral results in two or three states, and since the 'national' label is conferred on them or withdrawn on periodic review of their performance after each election. Thus their 'national party' status is unstable over successive elections, whereas they remain state parties throughout. On the rapid response of the BJP to the need for coalition building and the subsequent conversion of the Congress to this strategy, see Arora (2000).

13. Yogendra Yadav in *The Hindu*, 20 May 2004. This assessment was subsequently corrected after more detailed analysis, in Shastri *et al.* (2009).

14. Cf Palshikar (2009).

15. The BJP attempted introspection in Shimla in August 2009 on the basis of reports on the states by centrally appointed observers. Successes were generally linked to good governance in the states concerned whereas responsibility for failures remained vague and unassigned, not going beyond the 'need to avoid ideological dilution or confusion' (*Indian Express*, 11 August 2009).

16. Speech by President Pratibha Patil at the opening session of the 15th Lok Sabha, 4 June 2009 (Press Information Bureau, http://pib.nic.in accessed on 21 June 2009).

17. The state governments of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Sikkim were also voted back to power in April-May 2009. Earlier, the Delhi government was voted in for an unprecedented third term.

18. The PRP was recognized as a state party by the Election Commission of India after the declaration of results.

19. The comparison with national assembly elections in member states and elections to the European parliament is interesting though somewhat misleading because the European Union is not a centralized federation like the Indian Union.

20. The bi-nodal system of party competition at the national level corresponds perhaps closest to the 'Two Plus' category defined by Yadav and Palshikar (2006: 83) for party competition at the state level, with the occasional rise of a third nodal party detaching itself from the bi-nodal framework and making efforts to pull together an alternative coalition. The CPM played such a role in the 2009 elections. For an initial statement of the bi-nodal concept, see Arora (2003: 84).

21. Under the UPA-II government, the practice has resumed. For example, the GoM on food security has all three major coalition partners: NCP, TMC and DMK. The inclusion of the first two can no doubt be explained by their portfolios, Agriculture and Railways, but the inclusion of the DMK minister of textiles is perhaps more reflective of the interest of the coalition partner in this crucial area of public policy. On the multiple uses of GoMs under UPA-I, a preliminary assessment can be seen in Arora and Kailash (2007).

22. On the significance of the expanding welfare role of the Indian state, see Nayar 2009.

23. In the case of the UPA II, the Maharashtra, Kerala, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh elections constitute clearly the first horizon which determines the schedule and pace of its economic and social agenda.

24. The Land Acquisition Amendment Bill and the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill are crucial elements of the economic liberalization agenda of the UPA, which had managed to secure

the support of the Left parties in the 14th Lok Sabha, but faces opposition from its new Bengal ally, the Trinamool Congress.

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